VIPARIS, EUROPE'S NUMBER 1 CONFERENCE HOST, CREATES STATE OF THE ART HI-DENSITY WI-FI FOR THEIR VALUED CUSTOMERS

Viparis is Europe's number 1 conference and trade show host. It manages 10 venues in and around Paris, hosting 800 events and welcoming more than 10 million visitors each year. One challenge, says technical director Thierry Vaneycke, is to never get complacent about the appeal of visiting Paris: "As the leader of congresses and trade fairs at European level, Viparis works every day to improve practices, encourage creativity and innovation in hosting events. We want to make Paris the world capital of major events, corporate, congresses and trade shows. We have the tools for this and we continue to transform our sites for this purpose."

INDUSTRY-LEADING SERVICE LEVELS

Viparis is in the process of upgrading its infrastructure across every venue, from audio-visual to sanitary facilities to signage. "We want to provide the best levels of service of any operator in Europe," says Vaneycke, "and that includes Wi-Fi density."

Wi-Fi access, he continues, is a fundamental aspect of the visitor experience: "Without a high- performance Wi-Fi network it's not possible to have a successful event. Guests expect good Wi-Fi, clients demand it.

"Wi-Fi must provide friendly access – just a click to be online. In our customer satisfaction surveys the two areas of most concern to visitors are clean toilets and good Wi-Fi."

Network coverage all the time, every time

A conference at the Palais des Congrès would see up to 20,000 people in the venue, with 3,700 in the auditorium. "For this venue," says Vaneycke, "our aim is to provide visitors with at least one connection per seat with minimum bandwidth of 2Mbps. For event organisers or exhibitors, we want 8Mbps."

REQUIREMENTS
- Consistent, on-demand 2Mbps wireless access for every visitor
- Ability to track and manage 20,000 concurrent users
- Simplify management of access requests
- Enable structured secure network access policies
- Accommodate high-bandwidth spikes in network demand
- Create a platform to manage roll-out of IoT

SOLUTION
- Aruba 320 Series 802.11ac Indoor & Outdoor APs
- 7200 Series Mobility Controllers
- 350 Analytics Location Engine (ALE) licenses
- Aruba ClearPass Policy Manager 5k Virtual Appliance
- Aruba AirWave network management

BENEFITS
- Comprehensive high-density network coverage across site
- Load balancing to soften spikes in demand
- Discrete design to accommodate unique building
- Guaranteed 2Mbps bandwidth for visitors – and 8Mbps for exhibitors

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THIERRY VANEYCKE
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, VIPARIS

The logistics were further hampered by the architectural complexity of the Palais des Congrès building, and the requirement that no access points should be visible to guests. "It goes beyond receiving email or Tweeting, guests should be able to interact with a conference speaker or vote on a conference issue," says Vaneycke. "It has to work all the time, everywhere, and it has to work as the venue quickly scales from empty to full."

HIGH-DENSITY WIRELESS WITH GRANULAR MANAGEMENT

After detailed consultation, Viparis selected Aruba to drive its wireless overhaul. "The Aruba response was the most reassuring in terms of the ability to deploy a high-density Wi-Fi while considering our architectural constraints," says Vaneycke.

"Also, the stability of the Aruba platform was a key success factor."

The Aruba solution consists of HPE 5900 series switches at the core, with HPE 5510 and 5130 switches on the access layer. There are more than 300 Ultra-fast 320 series 802.11ac Wave 2 access points, plus three Aruba 7200 Series mobility controllers. Aruba extended the 2Mbps bandwidth from the 3,700 auditorium seats to a maximum of 20,000 visitors.

In addition, Aruba AirWave licences provide granular network management; Viparis is also testing ClearPass Policy Manager to manage guest access. Finally, Aruba Analytics and Location Engine (ALE) works with Aruba WLANs to collect presence data about Wi-Fi-enabled mobile devices while protecting personal privacy. Viparis then integrates this data with third-party analytics solutions that translate it into actionable business intelligence.

A discrete design

Once details of the solution had been sketched out, the priority shifted to ensuring the installation was completed quickly and with minimum disruption. The Aruba plan was approved in April 2016, with go- live expected by mid-August.

"It was essential we maintained the aesthetics of the venue," says Vaneycke. "Wherever possible we didn't want visitors to see the hardware."

Working alongside HPE Technical Services, the Aruba design meets these requirements. In the main auditorium, there are antennae built into the walls, painted to make them all but invisible. There are no access points visible, with ventilation built under seats. "It is a bespoke design," says Vaneycke.

Managing continuous change

Aruba ensures high-density wireless coverage and simple management in a demanding environment. Visitors and clients now have the access they need, Viparis has the platform on which to build new services.

Vaneycke is testing ClearPass to manage guest access: "In our business, we have new customers setting up every two or three days, with new wireless configurations to set up. The ergonomics and stability of the Aruba ClearPass solution will allow us to quickly and easily reconfigure different types of user."

However, it may be the introduction of IoT that accelerates the usefulness of ClearPass. Viparis is examining IoT as a means to improve building efficiency, monitoring elevators, escalators and restrooms with automated alerts. This will dramatically add to the number and type of devices connecting to the network.

Creating a platform for future innovation

The Aruba wireless network creates a solution for today, and establishes a platform for continued development. Viparis will open a new, purpose-built venue in 2017, the Paris Convention Centre.

"It will be the largest congress venue in Europe," says Vaneycke. "It will be able to host up to 30,000 visitors, with 5,200 seats in the main hall. We need to ensure every visitor has wireless connectivity."

Beyond the infrastructure investment, Vaneycke says the most exciting thing is the opportunity to mine usage data: "We collect data through the ALE platform and through our Bluetooth tags. All this data is stored in our data lake and we'll be working with Aruba to understand how best to analyse network use. I'm confident theses insights will help a create a better experience for our clients and visitors."